

**The Apostle's Creed:
I Believe in Jesus Christ Who Sitteth on the Right Hand
of God the Father Almighty**

Matthew 22:41-46; 26:59-64

By [J. Ligon Duncan](#)

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Matthew, chapter 22. We are continuing our study of the Apostles' Creed and we are in the section that deals with Jesus Christ. In that section we have noted two parallel sets of phrases. One that focuses on the humiliation of Christ and another that focuses on the exaltation of Christ. The consecutive sets of phrases on the humiliation of Christ go "crucified, dead, buried, descended into hell." Corresponding to that in counterpoint are three phrases in a set that speak of the exaltation of Christ; that He was raised, that He ascended, and that He sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. And so these provide a counterpoint to the sets with regard to humiliation and point to the exaltation of Christ. We're going to look at this, frankly, ubiquitous theme of Christ sitting on the right hand of God the Father, beginning by looking at two passages in Matthew today. Let's look at Matthew 22 beginning at verse 41, and then we'll look at Matthew 26. This is God's Word.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question saying: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son* of David." He said to them, "How does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The Lord said to My Lord, sit at My right hand, until I put thine enemies beneath thy feet.'? If David then calls him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question. Thus far the reading of God's Word.

Now turn with me to Matthew 26. We pick up at the interrogation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin in verse 59.

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death. And they did not find *any*, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, and said, "This man stated, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days." And the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do you make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you?"

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure you by the living God, that You tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Amen.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Lord, this is Your word. Show us Christ and His glory. Help us to appreciate what it means that He sits at the right hand. Open our eyes to trust in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel. Exalt yourself in Him and in Your word. We ask this all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Theologians have a shorthand word that they use to describe Jesus sitting on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. They call it the *session* or the *Heavenly Session*. *Session* just comes from the Latin word *sessio* which means *sitting* and so when theologians speak of the heavenly session of Christ, they are referring to that complex of events which is associated with Jesus sitting enthroned at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, that is, the enthronement of Christ at the head of the universe. And the heavenly session is the penultimate phase in God's exaltation of Christ. It's not the final phase in the exaltation of Christ. We won't see that unveiled until the second coming, but it is the next to the final phase in the exaltation of Christ.

The session, the seating of Christ at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, is a biblical word picture. It's derived obviously from royal practice that when a king is enthroned, he sits on the throne. And the one who is at the right hand of a king is the one who is given the position of pre-eminence and rule and honor. And so, the heavenly seating of Christ at the right hand of God the Father Almighty is a biblical word picture designed to enable us to appreciate Jesus' present heavenly rule. It's a Bible way of telling you that Jesus is in charge; that Jesus is on the throne; that Jesus is ruling the world by His word and Spirit. And that exaltation of Christ, that heavenly session of Christ, is the most comforting possible message that you could receive. The exaltation of Christ is a doctrine that helps us now in the Christian life. So I want to look at it with you today. I want you to see two or three things.

First of all, I want you to see that in the New Testament, the seating of Christ at the right hand is perhaps the main way that the New Testament testifies to the deity of the Messiah. Secondly, I want you to see that the sitting of Jesus at the right hand of the Almighty is a word picture that shows the heavenly rule of Christ now in the present. And then thirdly, I'd like to think with you about what that present heavenly rule means for us now.

I. The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand is one of the main ways the NT testifies to His deity.

Let's look at these things and let's begin by turning back to Matthew 22:41-46. The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand is one of the main ways that the New Testament testifies to the deity of the Messiah. Throughout His ministry, you'll remember, Jesus expresses to the Pharisees and to the crowds that they do not adequately understand who the person of the Messiah will be. They believe in a Messiah, they believe in a coming Messiah, they believe that that Messiah is the son of David, and they believe that that Messiah will vanquish their enemies. But Jesus says to them over and over that they do not adequately estimate all there is to know about the Messiah as seen from the Scriptures. And this is one of those passages. The Pharisees have gathered around Jesus; they've been asking Him questions and now He asks them a question, "Who is the Christ? What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" And they instinctively answer that He's the son of David. Well, that answer is correct, but it is not all there is to say about the Messiah and so Jesus quotes them a Psalm. He goes to Psalm 110:1. It is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms in the New Testament, along with Psalm 2, and Psalm 118. And He quotes to them Psalm 110, verse 1 that goes like this: "The Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet.'" Now David is the author of the Psalm, and Jesus asks them this question: If David's son is the Messiah, how is it that David could speak of his *Lord* being exalted to the right hand? Not David being exalted to the right hand, but his Lord being exalted to the right hand. You see, Jesus' question in Matthew 22:45. "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" None of the Pharisees were able to answer Him, but it was Jesus' way of saying to them you don't have a high enough estimation of the Messiah. He's not just the son of David, He's the Son of God, He's David's Lord. He'll be exalted to the right hand of the Father just like David says in Psalm 110:1.

Now this message was not lost on the early church. Turn forward with me to Acts 2. When Peter is preaching his first sermon at Pentecost in the Book of Acts in chapter 2 beginning in verse 32, you'll see him say this. "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." Peter is saying that Jesus is responsible for the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter is saying to Israel that the Lord about whom David spoke is Jesus. And so all at once, He's telling the people of Israel two things. The Messiah is more than

son of David; He's divine and Jesus is Him. In one fell swoop, in this quotation of Psalm 110, Peter is summing up the teaching of Jesus about Himself in His teaching to the disciples and the teaching of God's inspired Word in Psalm 110 about the Messiah and saying: the Messiah is deity, the Messiah is Son of God, and Jesus is that Messiah. Well that's the first way that Jesus' heavenly Session is used in the New Testament Scriptures to show that He is the divine Messiah.

II. The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand represents to us His present heavenly rule.

But there's a second thing that we learn from the New Testament about the heavenly Session. Turn with me to Matthew 26. In the New Testament, the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand represents to us this truth: That Jesus *is ruling now*. In other words, the heavenly session of Christ at the right hand of God the Father Almighty represents to us, in a word picture, the present heavenly rule of Christ. In Matthew 26, verse 59, you remember the council is gathered around Jesus and they are trying to get Him to say something that will incriminate Himself. They are expecting him to make a direct claim to be the Messiah, and as soon as He does, they will then accuse him of capital blasphemy and they will haul him off to the Roman authorities to ask them to administer the death penalty because He's both a blasphemer and a usurper of the Roman government because He claims to be a king. But every witness they bring in doesn't quite tell them enough to get him on the charge. Finally, they get somebody to come in that will say, "This man says He's going to tear down the temple and raise it in three days." And the high priest starts to badger Him. "Well, what do You say to that? Are you going to deny that? Explain that. How in the world could you have said something like this?" And he can't get Jesus to speak. Jesus is silent. He's not going to make any claims. Finally the high priest says, "I adjure you by the living God. Tell us whether you are the Messiah." And Jesus' response is unbelievable; it is absolutely phenomenal. He says, "You've said it yourself, but just so you'll be clear about it, you're going to see Me seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty coming in clouds of glory." Now, no wonder the high priest tears his robe. If anybody else other than God is standing in front of him and says something like that, that is indeed blasphemy. And the high priest tears his robe because Jesus is quoting from Daniel 7:13-14, and He is applying it to Himself and every Rabbi for the last 600 years knew that that was about the Messiah.

Now turn with me to Daniel 7. Daniel, you will remember, is speaking these words while in exile in Iraq with thousands of other Israelites. Now can you imagine a situation in which the people of God would be more discouraged? And Daniel, in God's mercy and kindness, has been given a series of visions to assure him of a couple of things. One, that God's covenant will not fail. Two, that God is ruling even though it looks like the world has absolutely gone crazy. And in one of those night visions, in Daniel 7:13, Daniel tells us he sees this, "I kept

looking in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man was coming. And He came up to the ancient of days and was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom that all the people's nations and men of every language might worship Him." His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

You see, Jesus was standing before the high priest of Israel and saying, "I'm that one." I'm the one the dominion was given to, I'm the one who will be worshipped by every tribe and tongue and people and nation, I am the one to whom the ancient of days Himself has given the rule of this universe. You see, in the New Testament, the seating of Christ at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, represents to us not just some one-day future rule, but Jesus' present rule, because when He ascended; He ascended to the right hand of the Father Almighty. His rule is now. And the Session of Christ confirms to us that Jesus the Messiah is now reigning; ruling the world by His Word and Spirit.

III. So, what does Jesus' heavenly reign mean to and for us?

Thirdly, what does this mean to you? The heavenly session of Christ points to the fact that the Messiah is divine and the Messiah is Jesus. The heavenly session of Christ points to the fact that He is reigning now. What does that mean to you? We don't have time to talk about all the things that that means to you. We could spend hours and weeks talking about what that means to you, but this morning, let's think together about three things.

First of all, the heavenly reign of Christ now means for you that the Lord Jesus' present activity in His heavenly life is on your behalf. Don't think of Jesus resting at the right hand. Don't think of Jesus in semi-retirement at the right hand. Don't think of Jesus as inactive at the right hand. Oh no, the New Testament makes it clear. When He is at the right hand, He is there, He is active, and He is working for you.

Let me give you a few examples of what the New Testament says He's doing at the right hand. In Acts 2 and 4, we are told that He is bestowing His Holy Spirit upon His Church from the right hand. In Acts 2 we are told that He's adding disciples to His Church. In Acts 9, we are told that He appears from the right hand to Saul on the road to Damascus to convert him. In Acts 3, it is Jesus from the right hand who heals the lame man. In Romans 8, and in Hebrews 8, we are told that He is making intercession for His people. In Hebrews chapters 2 and 4, we are told that He is aiding and sympathizing with His people from the right hand. In Hebrews chapters 7, 8, and 10, we are told that He is our great priest and He is doing a priestly work on our behalf. Appearing before the presence of God for us in, Hebrews 9, and as an advocate of the Father for us, in 1 John 2:1. Jesus is active for you at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. That's the

first thing that we learn for us about the heavenly session of Christ.

Now secondly, in response to that truth, what do we do? In response to that truth that He is there at the right hand reigning for us, what do we do? Well, one thing is that we lift up our hearts to Him. Friends, to the degree that we glory in the present heavenly reign, and to the degree that we long for His reign in our hearts, to that degree we experience the expansive comforts of His reign in our lives in the midst of the most difficult trials. It is the people that I have known who love Him the most--who long for His reign the most--who say most, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," and who say, "Lord, come and reign in my heart now," who, when the trials of life come, experience the comfort of the One who sympathizes with His people; from the throne, aiding them, helping them, holding them up in the midst of their trial. And so the only proper response for us when we contemplate our Lord Jesus, who is not just going to reign someday *then*, but is reigning now, is to desire His reign in our hearts, to desire His reign in our lives, to desire His reign in this world, to long for His coming in glory, and to then find comfort when we run into anything in this life that looks like Jesus isn't reigning.

Think again of Daniel. Daniel is living in a world where the people of God are in captivity to ancient enemies, and God shows him the picture of One going to the throne and receiving the kingdom. Why is God showing that to Daniel? He's saying, "Daniel, I'm in charge, and My Man's in charge, and I haven't forgotten you." And when you realize that your Lord Jesus is reigning *now* in the midst of your difficult trials, you too can remember that God is in charge and His Man is in charge, and He hasn't forgotten you. Those who most long and glory in the reign of Christ find the most comfort in the difficulties of this life.

Thirdly, one of Jesus' primary present activities at the right hand is intercession. And that is talked about all through the New Testament and we talk about it ourselves a lot, but you know what? Often times we misunderstand it. Often we have a picture of Jesus down on His knees begging God to do something. That's not the picture at all. He's at the right hand; He's ruling this world. He speaks and it is so. Just as God brought the world into being by speaking it into being, so the heavenly, the ascended, the reigning Christ speaks His will and it is so.

Let me give you an example of that. Turn with me to Acts, chapter 7. In Acts 7, we are given the testimony of Stephen. Stephen, the first Christian to die for Christ, the first martyr is the term we use. And Stephen, just as he is about to die for his Savior, looks up into the heavens and Luke tells us what happened in Acts 7:55, "And being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" Now, that is a remarkable passage by any estimation. I want you to see a couple of things about it.

The first thing I want you to remember is this is the first appearance of the risen and reigning Jesus Christ in the New Testament since His ascension. The first time that Jesus reveals Himself in His risen glory after the ascension is to the first Christian who dies for Him. Jesus loves His people and He reveals Himself to His people in their deepest need.

Secondly, I want you to notice this. He's not sitting. Over and over in the Old Testament, Psalm 2, Psalm 110, over and over in the New Testament, Matthew 22, Matthew 26, Hebrews 7, 8, 9, and 10; He's sitting. Why? He's sitting because that's a word picture. When the king is reigning, He's sitting on His throne. It's a beautiful way to describe the rule of Christ. Why is He standing? When Roman judges prepared to render their final verdict, they stood and they pronounced the verdict. Here is Stephen being judged wrongly by the chief religious leaders of his people. While he is being judged a heretic and a blasphemer because of what he has said about his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They are pronouncing him guilty and worthy of death and, in scant moments, they will pick up stones to stone him into oblivion and into the next life. When Stephen looks up to see, his Lord is *standing* to render a very different verdict. "Stephen, not guilty; Stephen, My child; Stephen, My disciple; Stephen, welcome into My kingdom. Today you will be with Me in paradise." And in every difficulty of life, you may know that the seated Lord is standing to render His true verdict on you: "You are My child, you've believed in Me, I render a different verdict than this world renders against you. I render not guilty, enter into My kingdom. Come and enjoy the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world. Because I go to prepare a place for you and if it were not so, I would not have told you." The Lord Jesus, from the right hand of God the Father Almighty, renders a very different judgment on His people than does the world.

My friends, I cannot imagine a truth more comforting in this upside down and backwards crazy world of sin in which you experience being sinned against and being betrayed. If you've ever been in a circumstance in which your name has been slandered and your reputation has been undercut, join Stephen and remember Jesus' verdict on Stephen. It was very different than the verdict of the world. And you know what? Jesus' verdict is the verdict that will stand at the last—not any other verdict. And that, my friends, is something worth praising Christ for. Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, we don't deserve this standing and seated Christ; but when we believed on Him, You gave Him to us and us to Him. Grant that it would be the deepest desire of our hearts all the days of our lives, to see Him glorified, to see Him reigning in our hearts and lives, to see His will being done on earth as it is done in heaven, and as we seek that glory, and as we seek His exaltation, would you comfort us in every hardship of life. For this we ask, in the reigning Jesus' name. Amen.

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